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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
“KOSOVO: CURRENT AND FUTURE STATUS”**

MAY 18, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank Chairman Hyde and Congressman Lantos for your leadership in calling this hearing and both of you for introducing H.Res. 24, calling on the United States to support the independence of Kosova now.

In order to address Kosova's current political and economic status and U.S. policy in relation to final status, I think that it is beneficial to briefly review the record of the U.S. government in responding to the conflict in Southeast Europe in the latter part of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century. When we do this, we see that the House International Relations Committee has consistently exercised leadership by throwing its support behind the aspirations for freedom and democracy on the part of the peoples in the region who suffered from almost fifty years of Communism after World War II and, in the case of Albanians, who have been the victims of racism and genocide much longer. Eighteen years ago, in June 1987, Congressman Lantos and then Congressman Joe DioGuardi introduced, with fifty-seven of their colleagues in the House, a resolution (H.Con.Res 162) exposing the egregious abuse of the human rights of Kosova's Albanian majority and calling for justice. A month later, in July 1987, Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic came to power on a platform of anti-Albanian racism.

Unfortunately, the State Department, under considerable pressure from former colleagues and American friends of Milosevic who got to know him when he was a banker in Washington, worked hard behind the scenes to promote Serbian dominance in Yugoslavia, a federation in the process of dissolution. In a letter to then Chairman of the House International Relations Committee Dante Fascell, State opposed H.Con.Res. 162 as an affront to Yugoslavia, America's "friend and ally." State also opposed the Committee's intent to have a hearing on H.Con. Res. 162, but Chairman Fascell and Congressmen Lantos and DioGuardi prevailed and the hearing was held. The hearing and the subsequent high-level meeting that Congressmen Lantos and DioGuardi held with State Department officials and the Ambassador from Yugoslavia to discuss human rights abuses in Kosova led Milosevic to recall his ambassador to the United States in a show of contempt.

A pattern was established in 1989 that continued for a decade with terrible consequences for the peoples of Southeast Europe. In 1990, the House Committee on International Relations called on the administration to end Milosevic's occupation of Kosova and to stop his military march across Southeast Europe after his forces attacked Vucovar and Dubrovnic in Croatia. In 1992, Congressman Lantos introduced the first resolution calling on the U.S. government to recognize the independence of Kosova. That same year Milosevic invaded Bosnia-Herzegovina. Not long afterward five members of the

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U.S. State Department resigned over their superiors' concealing of Milosevic's concentration camps in Bosnia. The photographs of emaciated Bosnian Muslim men, so reminiscent of the Nazi era, flashed across television screens throughout the world. Apart from President George Herbert Walker Bush's "Christmas warning" in 1993, admonishing Milosevic that there would be dire consequences if he waged war in Kosova, the State Department embraced a policy of appeasement and containment in the Balkans. State opposed the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, wanting to, in the words of then Secretary of State James Baker, "keep it together at all costs."

At the end of February 1998, the "Christmas warning" was violated, when Serbian military and paramilitary forces attacked Drenice and began to rape, pillage, and murder their way across Kosova. Milosevic's invasion was enabled State Department Balkan Envoy Robert Gelbard, when he publicly called the Kosova Liberation Army (the people's defense force that had risen up to defend Kosovar Albanians against the Serbian army) as a "terrorist" organization. Less than a month later, on March 12, 1998, Gelbard was forced to retract his statement in a hearing convened by then House International Relations Committee Chairman Ben Gilman. In May of that year, former Congressman Joe DioGuardi testified at a full committee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by Gordon Smith and Joe Biden, calling for military intervention to save the lives of Kosovar Albanians who were facing extermination.

By the time the United States was forced to lead NATO air strikes against Serbia in March 1999, with the collapse of then Balkan envoy Richard Holbrooke's weak-kneed diplomacy and under the moral suasion of then U.S. Secretary of State Madelyn Albright, Serbian military and paramilitary forces had killed more than 300,000 men women and children in Bosnia, at least 10,000 in Kosova (2,400 people are still missing), and had displaced more than four million.

For a short period of time, from March until June 1999, the Congress and the administration were united in bringing down Milosevic, and the American people broadly supported their government, especially as they watched Albanians forced out of their homes in Kosova on cattle cars and herded into camps on the border of Macedonia and Albania. But when the war came to an end with the capitulation of Milosevic, the United States agreed to defer any decision regarding Kosova's final status. This was the first indication that the State Department would re-embrace its historical Belgrade-centric orientation. In agreeing to put Kosova's final status on hold, the United States was also bowing to Western Europe, which it expected to shoulder primary responsibility for ending conflict in the Balkans. But if history in the Balkans has shown us anything, it has shown us that a divided Europe will not act without U.S. leadership.

The evidence of the past six years is that delaying final status has been a mistake. In the postwar period, Belgrade has consistently attempted to destabilize Kosova by opposing the integration of Kosova's Serbs. Just this past week, UN head of Mission in Kosova Soren Jessen-Petersen publicly expressed his disappointment with reports in the press

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that "Belgrade has once again discouraged Kosovo Serbs to be part of dialogue and part of Kosovo institutions." Kosovar Serbs have been intimidated into non-participation.

Above all, in the postwar period reactionary forces in Belgrade in Washington have succeeded in creating in the international media a false parity between the perpetrators of state-sponsored terrorism and the Albanian victims of genocide, some of whom have retaliated against individual Serbs. Even as it was discovered that withdrawing Serbian troops took Albanian corpses in refrigerated trucks across the border to be reburied in Serbia in an effort to conceal the scope of Milosevic's crimes and, even as it was discovered much earlier, that Serbian paramilitaries had burned Albanian corpses in the Trepca mines, the sovereign state of Serbia has been able to miscast the Albanians of the Balkans as the source of violence in the region.

It has accomplished this amazing feat (I consider it amazing because it runs totally counter to my experience in thirteen trips to postwar Kosova) solely because the majority of Kosovar Albanians are Muslims. In a post-9-11 world, it has been easy to convince Westerners, largely untutored in the history and realities of Eastern Europe, that Albanians are a potentially Muslim terrorist state in the heart of Europe. In reality, and as you have heard from my Kosovar colleagues today, Albanians are secular Muslims, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox Christians who have lived side by side in harmony for centuries.

Belgrade's effort to portray Kosovar Albanians as unworthy of their right to freedom and self-determination was made easier by the tragic events of March 2004, in which nineteen people (eleven Albanians and eight Serbs) lost their lives and thirty Orthodox churches and religious sites were either damaged or destroyed. The Serbian propaganda machine immediately depicted the violence that erupted a year ago as "reverse ethnic cleansing" of the Kosova Serb minority and as an orchestrated "anti-Christian" act on the part of Albanian Muslims. But neither was the case. Most Albanians deplored the violence that took place between March 17 and 19, 2004. A few incidents, including the UN's refusal to end a Serbian demonstration that made Kosova's main arteries impassible for three days and the drowning of an Albanian child in northern Kosova allegedly by Serbian adults, ignited a spontaneous eruption of pent-up anger and frustration on the part of beleaguered Albanians who had lost trust in the international community's intentions. The world should be surprised not that violence erupted in Kosova, but that it has happened so rarely in a society whose political and economic future has been held hostage to lack of final status for the past six years. Seventy percent of Kosovars are under the age of thirty, and more than sixty percent of the population is unemployed. In a February 2005, meeting, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher rightly captured the reality of U.S. policy in Kosova when he said that we are "stealing the lives" of Kosovar Albanians.

In the postwar period and notably after the events of March 2004, only the House International Relations Committee grasped the dangers of delaying Kosova's final status
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and keeping it on life support. At the start of the 108th Congress, Congressman Lantos and Chairman Hyde introduced House Resolution 28, calling on the United States to recognizing the independence of Kosova now, and held a full committee hearing on the independence of Kosova in May 2003. They reintroduced the resolution, now House Resolution 24, at the start of the 109th Congress. They did this not just because they are supporters of the human rights and dignity of human beings everywhere, but because they recognize that it is in the vital interests of the United States to have lasting peace and stability in Southeast Europe,

which can only begin with ending the de facto partition of Mitrovice and recognizing an independent Kosova.

It is in the vital interest of the United States not to create a seeming contradiction between calling for free and fair elections and democracy in Iraq and in the Ukraine, affirming the wholesale transition from Communism to democracy in the Baltic states, supporting the inclusion of Turkey, a moderate Muslim state, into the European Union, and then opposing the will of the people in Kosova who first voted for their independence in a national referendum in 1990. In the summer of 2004, more than one million Kosovar Albanians and hundreds of Kosovo Serbs, as well as thousands more Albanians in Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, Chameria, the Presheva Valley, America, England, Germany, Switzerland, France, Scandinavia, Australia, and New Zealand signed a petition calling on President Bush to support the passage of House Resolution 28, now H.Res. 24. (Parenthetically, the White House has not yet expressed a willingness to receive their signatures, either privately or publicly.)

It is in the vital interest of the United States to have a progressive Muslim Albanian majority in the heart of Europe. Albanians totally oppose the kind of reactionary and oppressive Muslim forces that have emerged in the Middle East, and have rebuffed their attempts to make incursions into the Balkans. It is also in the vital interest of the United States to support the freedom and democratic development of Albanians, who are the most pro-Western, pro-American ethnic group in Southeast Europe—and in fact in all of Europe. When America was attacked on 9-11, Albanians lit candles and held an all-night vigil with posters emblazoned with the words “We are with you,” while all too many Serbs, Macedonian Slavs, Greek, and Russians danced in the streets with joy at America’s pain.

It is in the vital interest of the United States to provide genuine support for the democratization of all societies emerging from Communism and ultranationalism. This means coming to grips with the fact that U.S. policy in the past fifteen years has failed to de-Nazify and democratize Serbia. While the Albanians of Kosova are at greatest risk because of this, it is also the case that Serbs in Serbia proper and in Kosovo are also suffering from our failure to dismantle the Milosevic system. Until the standards that have been applied to Kosova as a tactic for delaying final status are applied to Serbia first and foremost, Serbia will continue to be a quasi-Mafia state that destabilizes its neighbors. At a time when the United States is confronting a prolonged crisis in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East and the prospect of a nuclear North Korea, it is in the

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vital interest of the United States to end the prospect of war in Southeast Europe once and for all. President Bush’s decision to focus on final status resolution is a welcome one. House Resolution 24 will provide him with a blueprint for action.